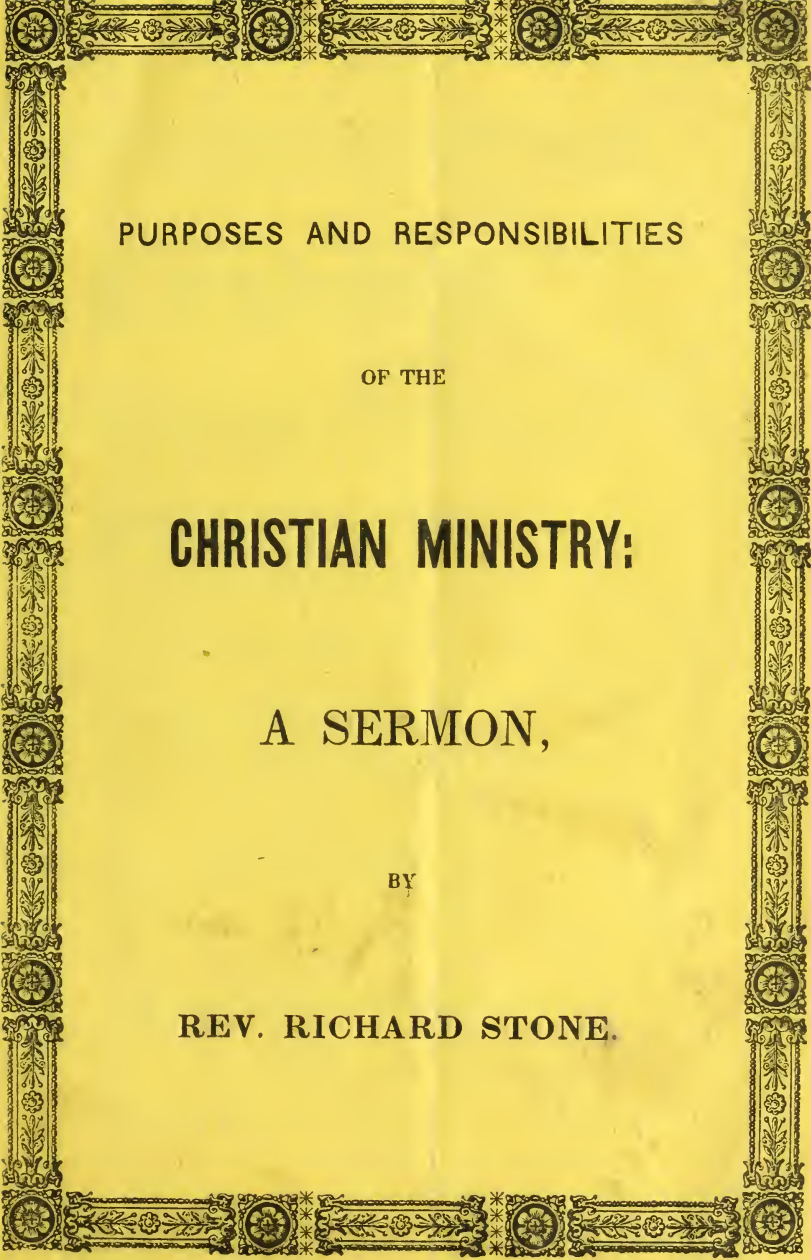




PURPOSES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

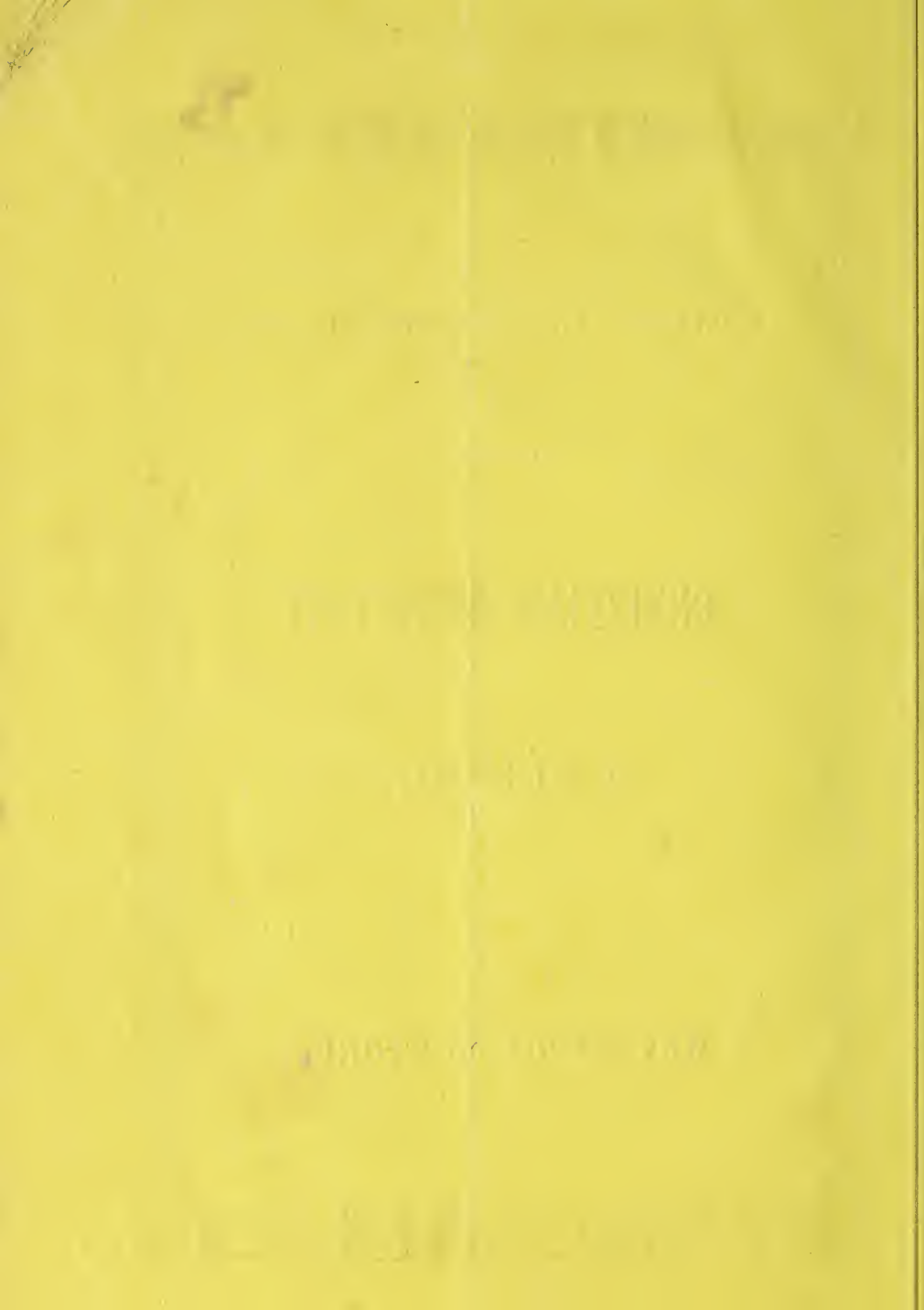
OF THE

**CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:**

A SERMON,

BY

REV. RICHARD STONE.



## POSES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

OF THE

with regard to the new

DELIVERED OCT. 28, 1840, AT THE ORDINATION OF

REV. JAMES L. STONE,  
MANSFIELD, MASS.

By REV. RICHARD STONE,  
PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN W. BRIDGEWATER.

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## DISCOURSE.

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### 1 THESSALONIANS, V. 12, 13.

AND WE BESEECH YOU BRETHEN TO KNOW THEM WHICH LABOR AMONG YOU, AND ARE OVER YOU IN THE LORD, AND ADMONISH YOU, AND TO ESTEEM THEM VERY HIGHLY IN LOVE FOR THEIR WORK'S SAKE, AND BE AT PEACE AMONG YOURSELVES.

THE establishment of the Christian Ministry is an important era in the history of Man, and was an improvement upon all former modes of touching the heart by the power of truth. "As ye go," says Jesus, "preach, i. e., make proclamation, sound the tidings of salvation in the ears of a benighted world, carry the light of Divine Truth to every sin-darkened heart, illumine every soul, that it may discover the power with which it is clothed, that it may put forth the germs of eternal life which have been there planted by an Almighty hand, and thus mount upward with me to the bright mansions of peace and rest." He, then, who belongs to the true Christian ministry, has a commission differing from any human agency, not that it raises him above his people ; but it confers upon him a right to demand for the truths of the Gospel a place in the human affections ; and these truths he is commanded to proclaim, to all the world, to every creature. The first teachers of Divine Truth, as the nature of the case seemed to demand, travelled from place to place, bearing the message of love and forgiveness to the listening multitudes. But, as the truths of Christianity found acceptance in the human heart, and communities felt their power and influence, regular established Churches followed, and Pastors were consecrated to the work of the

Gospel Ministry, designed to continue and perfect the work of Christian Salvation, develop its power and adaptation to the wants of the soul, and extend its benignant influence through all communities, and to all hearts. To carry on the same great work—to co-operate in the same sacred cause, is the present Ministry devoted. And there perhaps never was a time when the true relation between Pastor and People deserved a more serious consideration than the present. In this age of uneasiness, and distrust, and division, we may well inquire into the nature and intent of the Gospel, and the means by which it may be built up and sustained in the hearts of the People. The unsteadiness of public sentiment, the waves of discord so easily agitated and blown mountains high by the breath of any malicious, aspiring demagogue—the uncertainty resting on the legal character and rights of our Parishes—the frequency of ministerial dismissals, either by the instability of ministers or people—have fostered a state of disquietude, uneasiness, love of change, and insecurity, which almost defies the power of religious truth to regulate.

The fact that the Gospel is necessary to the salvation of man, and that it is sent into the world, implies a responsibility, vast and weighty, resting somewhere. And that we may the better understand the subject, our first inquiry is, for what purpose was the Gospel sent—and our second, on whom the responsibility rests.

We cannot doubt that Jehovah had in view a definite purpose, an object to accomplish, and that he foresaw the fitness of the means used to attain that object; hence his revealed word contains the instructions by which His true disciples are guided, and he who becomes the servant of the Most High, the herald of salvation has no right to add to or diminish his instructions—he is to bear the message which God has committed to him, and deliver it faithfully to his fellow men, whether they are disposed to scoff or to pray. The purpose

of God in establishing the christian ministry is the salvation of the soul—and the preacher has no right, yea, he is forbidden to lose sight of this, the prominent object for which the Gospel was instituted. He is left upon collateral subjects to pursue the dictates of his own judgement. Of rites and ceremonies, he is permitted to exercise the discrimination with which he is endowed ; but he has no right to introduce the impulses of his own mind, or his philosophical speculations, or the flights of his fancy between the soul of man and the word of God. He is commanded to go forth teaching all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; and he has the promise—“ Lo ! I am with you always, even to the end of the world,—with you, to accomplish the great object to which you are sent, to form the perfect man in Christ Jesus, who has the promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come. Proclaim the Gospel in the name of Jesus—say to the righteous it shall be well with him, for he shall eat the fruit of his doings ; but say to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” The Minister of the Gospel is to demand for his Master a full and perfect obedience ; he is not to rest satisfied, that men partially conform to the precepts of the Gospel, that they carry religion in one hand, and sin in the other ; but his aim should be to render them the sons of God, without rebuke. He may then, and not until then, be said to have accomplished the purpose to which he is called. And when this work is performed in the hearts of all professing Chistians, it will remove the angry dissensions and strife which now rend the Christian Church, and curb the sallies of avarice, envy and malice, from without ; but while the growth of Christian affection is stunted, and the germs of love to God and man are feeble, in vain may we expect a bond of unity and strength ; in vain may we expect a cord that will not, “ like flax, fall asunder at the touch of fire.”—Yes, “ the fire

will try every man's work, of what sort it is."—If it is not the fire of love to God, it will be the fire of avarice, the fire of malice, the fire of unkindness, of hatred, of ambition—and woe to that religious society, or religious people, who are ever ready to kindle and fan those flames among themselves ; woe to that Minister who promotes, by his example and precepts, the party factions which he may from time to time find rife among his people. The great object of the Gospel is to cure, to heal, to purify, to save ; but not by any compromise with sin, not by any yielding to vice ; but by copying the firmness and devotion to duty, which marked the character of his beloved Master. It is the purpose of the Gospel to expand the soul of man—to enable it to ascend from earth to heaven—to pour around it a light and a heat which shall warm and vivify the seeds of divine life sown within it by an Almighty hand—to give birth to man's spiritual nature, and fit it for the noble end for which it was destined—to grant a security against dishonesty and oppression—against strife and disorder, by the formation of a character, summed up in one word—CHRISTIAN. It is true that other advantages and other objects are gained by the christian dispensation, and are attendant upon the christian ministry—it restrains vice and checks the career of iniquity which otherwise would deluge the world with its dark and turbid waves—founds the institutions of charity, science, and letters ; it teaches those external virtues which fill the world with industry, competence, and social felicity ; and gilds with a rational happiness even the fire-side of him whose voice is raised in imprecation and blasphemy, and whose hand clutches the dagger of infidelity and unbelief.

Christianity thus blesses its enemies ; and it has been admitted by those who have most closely studied human nature, that a good Christian Ministry is the cheapest method of maintaining tranquility and order in a community, and of preventing litigation, crime and pauperism. These, however,

are but collateral advantages ; its greatest, its highest, holiest object, is the subjection of the individual affections, and the purification of the human heart. This glorious object is gained only by the reception of the true principles of Christian Faith and Practice, that is, the fundamental truths of Christianity. By this I do not intend to convey the idea that the distinctive view of any denomination is the full, perfect standard ; but there are certain great and fundamental truths which appertain to christianity, giving it life and power ; which if taken away, leave a cold and frigid mass, destitute of vitality and warmth. These, most christian denominations believe, and are the accountability of man to God—the necessity of conversion and regeneration, or the spiritual birth of the soul—a belief in the good consequences of virtue, and the bad consequences of vice, both here and hereafter—faith that the Scriptures are the true record of God's word—that Jesus was what he professed to be, a full and complete Saviour, and a future spiritual conscious existence. Without a practical belief in these doctrines, the salvation of the soul is never secured through the instrumentality of the Christian Ministry. Other truth or errors may be incorporated therewith which may aid or retard the progress of the truth ; but the tree of Christianity never did nor ever will flourish, but by the sap and nourishment drawn from these roots, the vehicles through which it receives its aliment. Whenever these are established in faith, correct action will certainly flow : as, when all the functions of the body are regular in their operations, health is the certain consequence ; so, when the mind is truly impressed with the fundamental truths of Christianity, it will produce the fruit of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and unite all Christians in the bonds of affection and Gospel love. An external bond of union may unite for a time—opposition to another body of Christians—building a new Meeting House—settling a Minister, or temporal interest ; these may unite

for a time, so long as the outward pressure lasts ; but when that ceases, it will avail little. The external conduct can never long be regulated but by inward abiding principle. Upon this the blessed fruit of righteousness will grow—will grow spontaneously upon truth within the soul, that heavenly Vine which entwines itself around the Tree of Life. The great purpose of God, then, in the establishment of the Christian Ministry is the salvation of the soul, and is the means which he has appointed to subject the heart to his dominion, through faith in Jesus Christ.

We now inquire, on whom the attendant responsibility rests? a responsibility as weighty, as the object to be attained is sublime and glorious—on whom rests the responsibility of promulgating the Gospel? The Apostle Paul declares “ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their tresspasses, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Here, then, we perceive the Word is committed to men ; those men, in all ages of the world, who compose the Christian Ministry, figuratively represented as earthen vessels ; that the excellency may appear of God. The Minister is responsible for the faithful delivery of his message,—if he minister aright, he has the assurance that the word which he preaches shall be the power of God unto salvation—as the messenger of Jehovah, to speak with demonstration and power. As the agent of God, he can, by faithfulness, call down the blessing of Heaven on his labors, or, by unfaithfulness, render his preaching ineffective and useless. The responsibility to bear the message of God, faithfully, rests upon the Ministry, and is dependant upon three points :

1. He is to present the truth in a plain, lucid, and pungent manner ; not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God ; bearing his testimony in a plain, simple, intelligible form, in favor of every christian virtue and doctrine, and against every

false principle and vice. The Pulpit should spare no vice, however fashionable, or pass by any virtue, however obscure. The condition of the soul, when dead in trespasses and sins, should feelingly, but truly, be drawn, its necessities explained, and its dangers pointed out, in such language, that the most unlettered mind can see itself and be induced to repent and turn to God. In plain language should the power and capabilities of the soul be set forth, and those fond desires and longings after immortality, felt more or less in every soul, brought out, and their expiring embers kindled into a flame. The deep springs of the heart too should be fathomed, the latent sources of joy or woe shown up to the mind's eye,—the clouds which obscure the bright glow of excellence brushed away, the glories of the eternal world, the happiness of those who improve, or the misery of those who abuse God's mercies, clearly pointed out. The accelerated improvement and growth in grace of those who walk in the path of the just, and the accelerated descent of those who shun the path of virtue, should be delineated, as on a map. Let the Christian Minister plainly inform his hearers, that they can avoid misery *only*, by avoiding sin. Let him ascend with them the mountain of God's love, and, standing on its summit, trace the rivers of sin through all their devious windings, until their dark and turgid waters are lost in the ocean of death. Let him show them the bitter and poisonous weeds which grow upon their brink, the fogs and damps which they engender, the bloated, sickly and decayed condition of those who drink their waters ; and finally, their dreadful end, shut out from a holy God. Let him contrast this with the bright waters of life ; show them the streams which flow from the Throne of God, trace them in the winding valley of life, by the fresh, green, luxuriant and healthy herbage which grows upon their banks, until they lose themselves in the paradise of God. Let him show them the Tree of Life which stands

upon their banks, and the vigor, the health, the bloom, which mantles the cheek of those who drink their soul inspiring waters. Yea, let him carry the soul into the Sanctuary of God, that he may behold, as did David, the end of the righteous and the wicked. Hear his language; "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; for they have no bands, and they are not troubled, as other men; and I said; verily I have cleansed my heart in vain. When I thought to know this it was too painful for me, until I went into the Sanctuary of the Lord, then I understood their end, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment, they are utterly confounded with terrors." Let the spirit of mysticism, dark speculation and spiritual fog, which envelope Jesus, his miracles, and even God himself, find no place in the Minister's teachings, or in his heart; but let the plain principles of the Gospel, with its hopes, its joys, its consolations, its woes, its encouragements, its promises, be clearly and faithfully delineated. Let the contrast between a mortal and an immortal life be presented to the mind for its contemplation; let the darkness of our mortal dissolution, the gloom of annihilation, the soul-withering idea that death is an eternal sleep, be contrasted with the bright hopes of immortal life. Let the cheering accents of Jesus echo in the ears of every desponding mourner—"I am the resurrection and the life; whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Let the faithful Minister sound in the ear the resurrection trump. But let it be the trumpet of Jesus, not the trumpet of his own imagination, not the trumpet of his own desires; but the resurrection trumpet of Jesus, that "they that have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Let these truths be shown up to the mind, so that it cannot mistake; so plain, so forcible, that its power may be felt in the soul, as it is with the souls of his flock, that the faithful preacher is most intimately concerned—

for them he is called to labor ; for them to endure reproach ; that he may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, and have many souls, as the seals of his ministry, as the crown of his rejoicing.

2. The Minister is under obligation to present the truths of the Gospel impartially ; that is, in their true proportions, in order to give it weight and influence ; and, in proportion as he fails to do this, will his ministry be weak and ineffective ;—those, who embrace religious truth, and form the religious character under his ministry, will be partial in their views, and feeble in their progress. If he presents the Gospel, as the fountain of deep feeling only, if awakened emotions of repentance, earnest audible prayer, constant attendance upon daily meetings, in which sympathy is awakened, and all mingle in one mass of excited feeling, and this is made the sum of religion, it will soon die away, and the convert will fall back into the darkness of moral death, to disgrace the cause of Christ by practical, if not avowed infidelity ; or, if he remains in the borders of Zion, to destroy by his wordliness and want of principle, to chill by his apathy in his days of darkness, what he will scorch and wither by excessive heat, in his days of zeal. On the other hand, if he present the Gospel, as merely the principle of right action, if he check every emotion of repentance, and, by reason and understanding alone, independent of the affections, aim to form the christian character, if all the warm endearments of the heart are repressed, and every rising emotion of gratitude and love congealed into a cold morality, he may expect, that his ministrations will be freezing and chilling, like his own soul, and the Church, to borrow a beautiful and appropriate metaphor, become “an island of ice in a sea of fire.” Again, if the minister present the Gospel to his people, as a system only, as a systematic set of doctrines, which follow upon and interlock themselves with one another and the whole, his people will generally

receive it, as such. They may be systematic theologians, be able to explain all the metaphysical subtleties which are incorporated with his system ; but the creed will contain most of the religion to be found in that church ; while, on the other hand, if he present no christian doctrines, upon which the christian character is to be built, his labor, though ever so arduous, will be vain and fruitless, a house upon the sand, swept away by the floods of error, which will more or less encompass it. If names and forms be the substance of the Gospel presented, the people will become formal in their views, and their religion may be summed up in the rituals of the church. If the minister is disposed to philosophise upon the doctrines of christianity, and to reduce every thing to the rules of some philosophy, either true or false, his influence may be seen in the cant of his disciples, and the arrogance and vanity with which they pride themselves upon their *transcendant* light.

Now, whoever gives to either of the points to which I have alluded an undue prominence, will make disciples ; but they will be disciples of his school, not of the school of Christ. It is his duty to direct every ray of gospel light to illumine and bring out the image of Jesus in its full and perfect proportions. The warm emotions of the soul, that holy fire which cheers and invigorates, while it consumes the dross, and that principle of truth which readily and unflinchingly adheres to right, through good and through evil report, should never be separated ; they, united, are the true impress of the Gospel, and the types were first set by Jehovah in the soul of Jesus. Thus, christian affection, christian principle, christian doctrine, and christian philosophy, should each bear their due proportion ; and in the hand of the Gospel Minister be fitted, adjoined and cemented into one grand and permanent edifice, whose base, resting on earth, can be comprehended by the lowest capacity, but whose top penetrates the infinity of God.

3. The minister is bound to present the Gospel to his people by his example ; examples speak to the heart, and impress upon the mind the truth which the tongue utters with a power which nothing else is capable of giving. Paul alludes to this, and declares that he was a “living epistle, known and read of all men ;”—and, should you enter into a close and careful examination, you will find that the character of the church does not rise above the level of the character of their minister. It is a truth, that he, who would teach others, must himself be taught ; he, who would cause others to feel the power of truth, must experimentally feel it himself ; he must find in himself the spring, or he can never conduct others to the fountain of life. He, who would pilot others to the haven of eternal rest, must himself be well acquainted with the channel by which they are to enter, and the harbor to which he directs them for safety and repose. He must possess the spirit of his Master, to carry him forward in the love and practice of duty. Without this his ministrations will be lifeless and dead, a body without a spirit, a corpse without life or power. He who enters the christian ministry, devoid of this spirit, is truly an object of commiseration ; the *congregation* who listen to such a minister is to be pitied ; but the *man* himself more ; he can have neither the prospect of temporal success, or the approval of a good conscience, to sustain him ; but doomed to drag out a life in a round of duties, in which he has no heart, no interest, no sympathy. As well may he gather grapes from the frozen regions of the North, or pluck roses from the cheek of death, as stamp the impress of Gospel Salvation by such a soulless presentation of truth. No, he who guides others to a Father’s love—he who points others to the cross of Christ—must himself have felt its renovating, soul-sustaining power.

Now, when the minister has thus performed his duty, plainly, impartially, faithfully, prayerfully, the responsibility for success rests upon the people—upon those who hear.

“If the watchman blow the trumpet, and warn the people, then whosoever taketh not warning, his blood shall be upon him.” When the faithful minister has discharged his duty in the fear of God, its success depends upon the hearers ; for, although he may preach with the inspiration of Heaven, yet those who hear can destroy its power and render it of no effect ; yes, my friends, the ministry is the channel through which Jehovah pours around you the waters of life ; but you have the power to cause them to run in vain—you can congeal them by your apathy ; you can freeze them by your coldness, until the stream, ice-bound and frozen over, will roll its deeper, warmer current by you forever. You may stand by its side from Sabbath to Sabbath, you may gaze upon its limpid waters, as they roll by, and yet never take the cooling draught which will quench the burning fires of sin in your own soul. The power and usefulness of a minister depends, in a good degree, upon the manner in which he is treated by his people ; he can bear reproach from his enemies, but the tongue of a false friend is a barbed arrow which will pierce his soul. If the minister is a man, he will have the feelings of a man, the sympathies of a man, the passions of a man, the frailties of a man ; and the kindness or the unkindness with which he is treated will be felt in his soul, and either strengthen or weaken his efforts in his labors in the cause of his Master. It is not to be supposed, that any man, however strong may be his purpose, can long stem a torrent of coldness among those who profess to be his friends. Opposition he may bear—slander he may meet and refute—insults he may disregard—injuries he may pass by in silence ; but the coldness of his friends, and their apathy upon the subject which lies nearest his heart, will crush the noblest talents—quench the ardor of the warmest heart—and chill—chill the affections of any soul.

Too often does the ardor and depth of interest felt in the settlement of a minister lead the people to the expressions of

too warm feelings — at the time honest, truly felt — and the pastor is greeted with ardor and affection at every house to which he directs his steps. On each returning Sabbath the house of God is well filled, and his words seem to drop as the rain, to distil as the dew ; he feels himself among an ardent, affectionate people, and rejoices in his prospect of success and usefulness ; but soon the aspect of affairs changes, and all this warm affection becomes cool. Why ? In part, because the natural warmth has subsided — the novelty of his settlement and acquaintance has worn off ; and, besides this, it is found, that the minister has an opinion—an opinion upon temperance—he has an opinion upon slavery—he has an opinion upon politics, and upon most moral and scientific subjects ; and, as an honest, consistent man, he acts in accordance with that opinion—not that he makes his pulpit the forum of debate, but he speaks as an honest, consistent man ; and often those who differ from him, instead of meeting him with a smile, meet him with a frown—soon he sees from these causes a large portion of his hearers indifferent to what he says or what he does ; Sabbath after Sabbath he preaches to almost bare walls and empty slips, half the day at least—when he earnestly and affectionately brings before his people the importance of personal religion and urges upon their consideration repentance and a holy life, indifference and inattention is marked on every face. If he can amuse them by his preaching, enable them to pass the Sunday pleasantly, and pass by all the sins of which they are guilty, and condemn no practice in which they wish to indulge, it is all well ; but if he is faithful to God and his own soul, reproves them for their sins, and has the independence to exercise an opinion upon any moral, scientific, or political subject, he may see, in the heart of his own parish, the furnace in which will be forged the fetters of coldness and opposition, by which he is to be bound—and, shame to that servant of God who has the servility to wear them. Those, who are continually looking upon their

minister for a difference of opinion with themselves, will soon lend a willing ear to every tale of scandal, which malice and envy put in motion—soon will his soul be chilled by the fact, that some of his parish put more confidence in an idle report, originating in the hot-bed of hatred and ill-will, than they do in his integrity ; and thus his effort to do good will be repressed, and that arm, which it should be their object to make strong, struck down and paralyzed. Such a people will never long know those who labor among them, will never long esteem them highly, will never long be at peace among themselves, although an angel from Heaven should occupy their pulpit, or minister at their altar.

It may therefore be perceived, that a responsibility rests upon the people, to be fellow-helpers in the vineyard of the Lord.—It is as necessary that the light of the christian should shine, as that the light of the minister should shine, and that their beams, commingling, should light up the candle upon the altar of God. A mutual forbearance between minister and people, and a union of thought, and purpose, and affection, so far as the spread of the Gospel is concerned, is indispensably necessary in the happy and successful union which we this day consummate between pastor and flock—and the people who receive and settle a minister, by that act pledge themselves to co-operate with him for the promotion of the objects to which he is called—they pledge themselves to aid him in the cause of faith and holiness, to strengthen his hands and encourage his heart, while he bears up the ark of God. When both parties are faithful to this pledge, and feel the importance of a real, living, spiritual life in the soul, when there is a deep aspiration for the pure, the infinite, and the holy—when the labors of the faithful minister are carried forward by the ardent zeal and prayerful energy of the christians to whom he ministers, even the waste places in Zion will flourish, the wilderness will blossom as the rose—neighborhoods, towns, societies, churches, christian hearts will bear witness to its

power and feel its renovating and soul-hallowing influence. A church, society, and minister whose hearts are thus knit together will do all things without murmurings and disputings—will be at peace among themselves. The minister will be, to such a people, the minister of religion ; not a minister whose principal aim shall be to make them popular ; not the minister who shall wink at their vices, however fashionable ; not the minister who shall be the amusing and facetious companion of their social circles ; not the minister who will, by his wit and humor, render every one satisfied and happy with himself, however indifferent and sinful he may be ; but the minister whose first business is to bring to repentance, to purify and save the soul—to breathe the love of holiness into every heart—the burden of whose study hours is to compose such sermons, as shall unfold the truth and the whole truth in its grandeur, simplicity and power—whose public labors are full of the zeal, the love, the piety, the devotion of his Master. Such a minister, among a people who will not damp his ardor, will prove a blessing to the community in which his lot happens to be cast. The grand aim of his pastoral labor will be to mould the characters of his people into the moral resemblance of his Father in Heaven—to awaken inquiry—to open the inlets of christian love—to brush aside the clouds and darkness which hang over the feeble christian's path—to pour the oil and wine of consolation into the wounded heart—to calm the throbbing arteries of woe—to sooth, with an angel's tenderness, the pains of sickness and earthly trial—and to point the eyes, while darkened by the film of death, to the sacrifice of Jesus, in all its rich tones of melting sympathy and love. The man of God who thus holds forth the word of life to a people who “know him, while he labors among them,” and have souls to sympathize with him, need not fear that he shall run in vain ; but he will have some “souls as the seals of his ministry, as the crown of his rejoicing.”





